AN

INQUIRY,

Whether the ſtudy of the ANCIENT LANGUAGES be a neceſſary branch of MODERN EDUCATION?

Wherein, by the way, ſome obſervations are made on a late performance, intitled, *Eſſays on the Origin of Colleges, of the cuſtom of Lecturing in Latin*, &c.

——— *Omni antiquitate, quæ quo propius aberat ab ortu, et divina progenie, hoc melius ea fortaſſe quæ erant vera cernebat.* CICERO, Tuſcul. Quæſt.

By John Gillies

On the 29th ult. the Rev. Dr. John Gillies, one of the Miniſters of Glaſgow.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

TO
J. J. ROUSSEAU.

SIR,

YOU know from experience, that a man no ſooner becomes eminent than he is expoſed to many inconveniencies. Superior talents ſeldom fail to raiſe up againſt the poſſeſſor of them many rivals who envy, enemies who hate, falſe friends who betray, and fooliſh *admirers*, who ſometimes do more hurt than all the reſt put together. To the laſt of theſe claſſes you are more expoſed than any writer alive, as you are both the moſt ſingular and the moſt eloquent writer of the preſent age.

YOU have often been accuſed of maintaining paradoxes; and, I dare ſay, you are ſenſible the accuſation is but too juſt. It is hard, however, that you, who have ſo many of your own to anſwer for, ſhould be made accountable for thoſe of other perſons. But this, hard as it is, you

muſt expect to meet with. Every petti-fogger in the art of authorſhip, who takes it into his head that he is an original genius, will ſuppoſe himſelf your couſin at leaſt, and, as ſuch, will uſe the rights of conſanguinity. You will be haraſſed with his addreſſes, letters, dedications, &c.; and thoſe who do not know but there may be ſome real connection betwixt you, will conſider you as a party to all his abſurdities.

THIS has been remarkably the caſe with regard to a late dedication to you. The author of the Eſſays on Colleges, &c. who, like Zoilus of old, ſeems deſirous of raiſing the fabric of his own reputation on the ruins of the reputation of thoſe authors who have, for ſome thouſand years, been the objects of univerſal eſteem, finds not a fitter perſon than you to patroniſe his performance: juſt as if you and he were of the ſame opinion; juſt as if, in your ingenious performance on education, a performance in the true ſpirit of antiquity, you had debarred your Emilius from the knowledge of the ancient languages, and repreſented the whole body of ancient philoſophers

philoſophers as *mere quibblers* and *declaimers* *. No, Sir. Theſe are not your ſentiments. It is he only who is an admirer of antiquity who ought to make free with your name. Your ſentiments and his are conformable. You acknowledge that Emilius is only to be taught the great ſcience of human nature by ſtudying the writers of Greece and Rome; and a contempt of antiquity is not a ſingularity with which you can poſſibly be charged by any one who has read your works.

I am, with reſpect, &c.

* Eſſays on Colleges, &c. Dedication.

Glaſgow, April 1769.

AD-

philosophers as more obscure and declama-
tories. He is the only who is an admirer
of antiquity who ought to make free with
your manner. Your sentiments and his are
conformable. You acknowledge that Ju-
venalis is only to be taught the true
science of human nature by studying the
writers of Greece and Rome; and a con-
temper of antiquity is not a singularity
with which you can justly be charged
by any one who has read your works.

I am, with respect, &c.

Essays on Colleges, &c. D

ADVERTISEMENT.

WHat ſuggeſted to me the deſign of the following performance, was the reading ſome Eſſays on the origin of Colleges, &c. lately publiſhed in this place. It was not the point the author propoſed to prove that gave me uneaſineſs. The ancient practice of lecturing in Latin is now ſo generally gone into diſuſe, that to attempt diſproving it is to combat a phantom, which has no exiſtence but in the diſordered imagination of him who is afraid of it.

It was the introducing into theſe eſſays ſome obſervations with regard to ancient literature, obſervations too no way connected with the ſubject of them, which made me think, that this performance deſerved ſome ſtrictures and animadverſions.

There was little danger indeed to be apprehended from theſe eſſays, conſidered in themſelves; but when taken in conjunction with the opinions and circumſtances of the preſent age, their effects, in this place at leaſt, might have been far from

from inconſiderable. A weak ſtroke which hits a tender or diſeaſed part, may do more harm, than one of incomparably greater force, which falls on a ſound, or leſs delicate member.

There is one point I ſhould wiſh to clear up in this advertiſement. The Eſſays on Colleges, &c. are by ſome people ſuppoſed to have been written under the inſpection of one of the profeſſors of the univerſity of Glaſgow. Conſidering that this univerſity has been long the moſt diſtinguiſhed in Scotland for the ſtudy of ancient learning, it is matter of ſurpriſe, that ſuch an opinion ſhould ever have ariſen; but ſince it has, there is no doubt, but, from the malignity, prejudices, or intereſt, of particular perſons, it will be induſtriouſly propagated. Now, the conſequences of this, which are too numerous to be mentioned, would ſpeedily be felt by thoſe who are concerned in them. What notions, for inſtance, our more refined ſouthern * neighbours, who ſtill retain a warm ſide for the ancient authors, would form from ſuch a ſpecimen of the

* The Engliſh.

taſte

taſte and literature of this univerſity, it is not difficult to conceive.

I am convinced, however, that no one who is acquainted with the members of the univerſity of Glaſgow, can be brought into a belief, that any of them ſhould have been concerned in that publication. Several miſtakes in point of erudition, and prejudices with reſpect to matters of another kind, are too obvious and glaring to allow it to paſs for the production of any member of a ſociety ſo diſtinguiſhed for learning and good ſenſe.

To give an example or two: The author obſerves, p. 19. "That though every "nation among the ancients had a religion "in ſome meaſure peculiar to itſelf; yet "none of the ancient nations ever pretend-"ed to imagine, that theirs was the only "true religion in the world. They all ac-"knowledged, tacitly at leaſt, that the gods "of their neighbours, their faith, their "ceremonies, were as good as their own." Now, not to mention that this paſſage diſcovers an ignorance of the hiſtory of the eaſtern nations, which people in general are not much acquainted with, I would obſerve, that this author does not appear

to have read even the beſt known of the Roman * writers, who have not only *pretended to imagine*, but, in innumerable paſſages, have aſſerted, that the gods of their neighbours, their faith and ceremonies, were not ſo good as their own. Take an example from Cicero, which every ſchool-boy that reads his Kennet is acquainted with: "Sed pietate ac religione, atque "hac una ſapientia, quod deorum immor-"talium numine omnia regi gubernarique "perſpeximus, omnes gentes nationeſque "ſuperavimus." But there is no occaſion to recur to particular paſſages. Who does not know that the laws againſt foreign rites, ceremonies, and ſuperſtitions, were among the moſt ancient laws of Rome, and continued ſo long in force, that both Jews and Chriſtians were often perſecuted and puniſhed according to them?

The author, however, is not contented with applying this obſervation to the Gen-

* Neither were theſe notions peculiar to the Romans.

Immortale odium, et nunquam ſanabile vulnus,
Ardet adhuc Ombos, et Tentyra: ſummus utrinque
Inde furor vulgo, quod numina vicinorum
Odit uterque locus; cum ſolos credat habendos
Eſſe deos quos ipſe colit.

Juvenal, ſat. 15.

tiles,

tiles, but, like other ſage philoſophers, when he has got hold of an idea, he is for extending it over the whole face of the earth. Beſides, if there had not been ſomething levelled againſt the Jews, he would not have imitated Voltaire, that profound modern wit. It is obſerved accordingly, p. 20. that even ſome of the Jews ſeemed to entertain notions of this kind, *i. e.* the Jews thought the gods of their neighbours, &c. as good as their own. But it is the buſineſs of the clergy to animadvert upon this paſſage. All I would infer from it is, that it is highly improbable any teacher of youth would be the firſt to broach ſuch doctrines, and conſequently, that the Eſſays on Colleges, &c. ſhould be the work of a profeſſor.

This concluſion ſeems likewiſe to follow from what is ſaid p. 22.; where the author accuſes all the Chriſtian churches, without exception, of being infected with the ſuperſtition which proceeded from the ignorance of the firſt ages, juſt as if every good Proteſtant did not know, that the religion of this and many other churches of Europe were founded on the ruins of that ignorance and ſuperſtition.

I will not ſpend time in mentioning the

author's miſtakes with reſpect to the Greeks and Romans, p. 15. Who but himſelf ever confined to Egypt the travels of the inquiſitive Greeks in ſearch of knowledge? Let one who would know what progreſs the Greek language and philoſophy had made, not only in Rome, but over all Italy, in the time of Cicero, read his well-known oration, *pro Archia poeta*. To the Greeks, indeed, the Roman writers univerſally aſcribe the honour of inſtructing them in every branch of polite learning; and Cicero himſelf, though on many occaſions he diſcovers a degree of prejudice in favour of his country, which by ſome people may be thought inconſiſtent with his extenſive genius, and univerſal knowledge, does not heſitate to prefer the honour of writing elegantly in Greek to that of writing elegantly in his native language. The reaſon he aſſigns for this is ſufficient to refute that vulgar miſtake, that the ancients ſtudied no language but their own. "Propterea," ſays he, "quod Græca leguntur in omnibus "fere gentibus, Latina ſuis finibus exi-"guis ſane continentur."

But it may likewiſe be obſerved, that the author does not appear to be better acquainted

acquainted with the hiſtory of the modern nations of Europe, than with that of the Greeks and Romans. Page 25. he ſeems to think, that the nations which overran the Roman empire were not acquainted with Chriſtianity before their conqueſt. "They annihilated the Roman govern-"ment," ſays he; "but they became "Chriſtians." Now, it is univerſally known, that moſt of thoſe nations had not only embraced Chriſtianity before this period, but become ſo ſtrongly attached to it as to entertain more reſpect and veneration for the clergy than this body of men had ever before met with. The clergy reaped the firſt fruits of their victories, and from their hands received thoſe liberal endowments of lands, lordſhips, and vaſſals, which put them on a footing with the lay-barons and chieftains of thoſe times.

Beſides, in accounting for the origin of colleges, the author is ſo vehement in declaiming againſt the inſolence of the Pope and clergy, that one would think, by his way of ſpeaking, that he conſidered the inſtitution of colleges as one of the moſt inſolent tricks of which the Sovereign Pontiff was ever accuſed. And this ſuſpicion

ſpicion is not a little confirmed, when one conſiders, that the Eſſays on Colleges, without any apparent reaſon, are dedicated to J. J. Rouſſeau, an author who, though he informs us, that he is careful never to forget himſelf ſo far as to pray; yet, compelled by his humanity, for once forgets himſelf, ſo far as to throw out a pious wiſh againſt colleges: "We have "no colleges for our girls; would to God "we had none for our boys *." Now, it ſurely cannot reaſonably be ſuppoſed, that a profeſſor would be an advocate for aboliſhing colleges.

But is there any profeſſor in the college of Glaſgow who was born in the highlands, or is an adept in Gaelic erudition? Were this the caſe, after all I have ſaid, a ſtrong ſuſpicion might lie againſt ſuch a one. For towards the concluſion, the author obſerves, that he ſees no reaſon why the man who knows the Erſe word for *love* ſhould not be deemed as profound a ſcholar as he who knows how to tranſlate it into both Greek and Latin. But there is no ſuch profeſſor in that univerſity.

* Emilius.

AN INQUIRY,

Whether the ſtudy of the ANCIENT LANGUAGES be a neceſſary branch of MODERN EDUCATION?

CHAP. I.

THAT Philoſophy is not exempted from the authority of faſhion, every one who is acquainted with the hiſtory of letters muſt allow. In all the compaſs of hiſtory no two periods can be aſſigned, during which the ſpeculative opinions of men were perfectly conformable with regard to any one ſubject. Ever unſatisfied with extending or new-modelling the ſpeculations of thoſe who went before them, philoſophers, in general, have diſcovered an inclination to

obliterate the opinions of their predeceſſors in ſcience, and to ſubſtitute their own in their place. Theſe new opinions, if defended with ability and addreſs, are univerſally imbibed, and compoſe the faſhionable philoſophy. Were a man of letters to diſcover an attachment to opinions more ancient, he would be as much an object of ridicule to the learned of the times, as a lady who ſhould appear in public with her ruff and farthingale, or a member of parliament who ſhould enter the houſe with a helmet and coat of mail.

It is not, however, over the opinions alone which mankind embrace with regard to any one branch of ſcience, that faſhion exerts her authority; ſhe is, if poſſible, ſtill more conſpicuous in determining the relative importance of the different branches of learning, and in turning the attention of philoſophers to this or that ſcience, according as ſhe deigns to countenance the one or the other.

To a cool unprejudiced man, who had attended to the conduct of philoſophers, thus directed by faſhion, it would appear as ridiculous as that of children gathering ſhells or pebbles: theſe the little

triflers

triflers take up, and throw aſide, juſt as their fancy directs, till perhaps, after long ſearching, they return home, with a parcel in all reſpects inferior to what they had at firſt collected.

I have attributed to faſhion the changes which are obſervable in the literary world, becauſe it is a matter of the utmoſt difficulty to aſſign thoſe general and permanent cauſes on which they depend. I have not attributed them to chance; becauſe that would cut off all further inquiry about any cauſes whatever; which ought not to be done unleſs the diſcovery of theſe appeared quite impoſſible. To moſt people, for any thing I know to the contrary, it may do ſo; but the ſubject is ſo curious at leaſt, that it ought not to be altogether neglected; particularly as there is no danger attending it, and every one is at liberty to approve or condemn the obſervations which may be made, according as he ſhall diſcover them to be more or leſs conformable to experience.

Mankind are evidently formed for ſpeculation, as well as for action. But, in the individual, the talents for action make their appearance long before the rational

or ſpeculative powers begin to open and expand themſelves. A child walks, runs about, handles every thing that falls in his way; and from this principle of activity is often in danger of doing hurt to himſelf, and many objects around him. But how long is it after this, before the powers of his underſtanding are fully evolved, and he becomes capable of reflecting on the relations betwixt himſelf and the various objects of his perception? This obſervation holds equally with regard to the ſociety. Savages are but little capable of reflection: when they are not engaged in war, or in hunting, they ſleep, debauch, or game; becauſe they are acquainted with no other method of employing the little leiſure they enjoy. The difficulties they have to ſtruggle with in acquiring the means of ſubſiſtence, the conſtant dangers with which they are on all ſides ſurrounded, the cruel attacks upon their lives or liberties, to which they are every moment expoſed, render their ſituation altogether repugnant to abſtract reaſoning, or philoſophical ſpeculation. Upon the inſtitution of government, however, which affords to individuals a degree

of

of ſecurity, leiſure, and tranquillity, till then unknown, mankind will begin to cultivate their intellectual powers, and to inquire into the nature and relations of every object they behold. Hence the origin of philoſophy.

Upon commencing this new employment, upon beginning to reaſon and reflect with a view to acquire knowledge, and to exerciſe their underſtandings, it is remarkable that mankind ſoon became too ſanguine in their expectations, and imagined they might derive from philoſophy a variety of knowledge and improvements, which in all probability it will never be able to afford. The firſt ſpeculatiſts in every nation have attempted to penetrate into ſubjects which will for ever reſiſt all the efforts of the human underſtanding. That this was the caſe of old, no one who is acquainted with antiquity can deny. It is not indeed ſo eaſy to trace the progreſs of the human mind in philoſophy among the modern nations of Europe; becauſe theſe nations were ſcarce emerged from barbarity, when the ſtores of ancient wiſdom were laid open to their view, which not only quickened their natural progreſs,

but

but diverted it to different channels, according as the ancients had handled one ſubject more fully than another, or as their works on theſe ſubjects came down to us more or leſs entire. It is obſervable, however, that thoſe books of the ancients which pretended to make the deepeſt diſcoveries, to teach us the moſt abſtract and profound ſort of knowledge, were read, and ſtudied, and commented on, before the more agreeable and uſeful performances met with the ſmalleſt attention. Nay, even after ſome of the finer ſpirits among the moderns, captivated with the elegant models of antiquity, had begun to imitate in their own language the ancient orators, hiſtorians, and moraliſts, the bulk of mankind were ſtill graſping after ſhadows, and bewildered in the perplexing mazes of metaphyſics * and ſchool-divinity.

The

* It is not from a contempt of theſe ſciences, that the author ſpeaks of them in this manner. Metaphyſics, when confined within proper bounds, is one of the moſt uſeful branches of learning that is at preſent taught in our univerſities; and without a competent knowledge of it, we cannot make the ſmalleſt progreſs in any moral ſcience. It was the manner of treating it in the darker ages, the variety of queſtions which were ſtarted upon it, either altogether

The ſame thing therefore happens upon the origin of philoſophy, which takes place upon the firſt diſcovery of any uſeful invention. This invention being new, is regarded with admiration, and has an importance and dignity ſtamped upon it, which is greater than it deſerves. We have diſcovered its utility for ſome purpoſes to which we have applied it; and our fond partiality makes us believe that it may be uſeful in many more. In the ſame manner, when mankind began to philoſophiſe, this employment was new and unuſual; they were ignorant of the ſtrength, or rather weakneſs, of their faculties; and from a natural propenſity to think favourably of themſelves, and whatever belongs to them, they ſet no bounds to their ſpeculations, but

together inſignificant, or which could never poſſibly be anſwered, that rendered the metaphyſics of thoſe days an object of contempt. The ſame obſervation applies in part to ſchool-divinity, though this be a ſcience for which I acknowledge myſelf to feel much leſs reſpect: Divinity is a ſubject ſo fertile and copious, and which, if treated with propriety, may be made ſo uſeful in forming the affections of the heart, that it is a pity the polemic part of it, in ſome of our univerſities, ſhould alone be attended to, while the ſentimental is altogether neglected.

attempted

attempted to ſoar above the reach of the human comprehenſion.

Theſe obſervations apply to the finer arts, as well as to the ſciences. In the early ages of the world, what wonders were thought to be performed by the power of poetry? let one who would be acquainted with them, read Horace's art of poetry, or the eighth eclogue of Virgil. It is true indeed, that later writers amongſt the ancients explained theſe effects in a figurative or allegorical manner; but we have too many inſtances to perſuade us, that in the earlieſt ages they were taken in a literal ſenſe. Poetry, in a rude nation, was never confined to pleaſe the fancy, or affect the paſſions of the heart; its influence extended over all nature; it tamed wild beaſts; it raiſed the walls of cities, called up the ſpirits of thoſe who were dead, and brought the heavenly bodies from their orbits *. Theſe were its ſuppoſed effects among the ancient nations; and among the modern they were no leſs remarkable. Hence that motley brood of charms and inchantments aſcribed, not on-

* Carmina vel cœlo poſſunt deducere lunam.

ly to verſes, but to the very characters in which they were written. Hence thoſe tales of witches and magicians, dwarfs and giants, which, within theſe two centuries, were credited by the vulgar in all the nations of Europe.

This principle, which, upon the firſt diſcovery of the arts and ſciences, operated ſo ſtrongly, and induced mankind to expect from them many improvements and advantages which they were never capable to yield us; this principle, I ſay, call it the admiration of novelty, or by whatever name you pleaſe, appears to me to have attended them in every ſtep of their progreſs. The effects of it indeed are more obvious, and conſequently more ridiculous, among rude and ignorant men, than they are among us at preſent; but whoever will attend to them as they are diſplayed even in the moſt improved countries, will find them abundantly abſurd.

Each ſcience has had its vogue in the different ages during which it was cultivated with the greateſt ſucceſs. A few lucky diſcoveries or improvements have always been ſufficient to elevate the ſcience in which they were made, above all others,

and to give it an excluſive privilege to our attention and regard. We are ignorant how far it may carry us, and fondly hope, that ſome advances may be made, which will not only aſtoniſh, but greatly benefit, mankind. In purſuit of theſe chimeras, all the learned engage, and the vulgar look up with admiration on the labours of their contemporaries. All other branches of knowledge are neglected or deſpiſed, and nothing is to be heard of but the philoſopher's ſtone, the criterion of truth, the univerſal medicine, or perpetual motion. Have the ſtudies of hiſtory and politics received any improvements? we ſhall then be amuſed with ideas and ſchemes of perfect governments, and hiſtories of ſociety, by which it is pretended the manners and cuſtoms of all nations are explained; and as theſe reſearches require no mechanical contrivances, or chymical preparations, the viſionaries who are employed in them are more lucky, as to money-matters, than moſt others.

If then what is called the faſhion in philoſophy, depends on the principle we have aſſigned; if the opinions we embrace upon the different ſciences, as well as the

relative

relative importance of the ſciences themſelves, be determined in the manner we have explained; how highly improper muſt it be to declaim againſt the force of prejudice and cuſtom in literary matters! Theſe declamations were never more common than in the preſent age; and, I may add, never more uſeleſs. In no point whatever are the bulk of mankind leſs diſpoſed to pay reſpect to the opinions of thoſe who went before them, than in matters of this ſort. They follow implicitly as the learned of their own times point the way. But ſhall we be afraid, that the philoſophers of the age will pay too much deference to ancient opinions? May not this deference prevent all further improvements? The tyranny of civil or eccleſiaſtic power may cramp the genius of man, as it may debaſe or pervert his taſte and ſentiments. But remove theſe obſtacles, and there is little danger, that a veneration for antiquity, as it is called, will of itſelf be ſufficient to produce theſe effects. The affectation of ſingularity, the love of applauſe and admiration, the ambition of being conſidered as the founder of a new ſect, and the author of new opinions, will al-

ways be the prevailing motives with philoſophers. None of theſe paſſions can be gratified by treading in the footſteps of their forefathers, and retailing what a thouſand others have ſaid before them. Something new or uncommon muſt be attempted; and the works of former authors, being ſo many obſtacles in the way to pre-eminence, muſt be removed before their own can attain that rank they wiſh them to poſſeſs. It is not therefore a prejudice in favour of ancient opinions we ought to be afraid of; we have much more reaſon to dread the bad effects of a prejudice in favour of thoſe which prevail in our own times. This prejudice it is far more difficult to reſiſt; and a man muſt be a true philoſopher, inſenſible to the empty applauſe, as well as the ill-grounded ridicule, of his contemporaries, who can have courage to withſtand and oppoſe it.

If what has been ſaid could deliver us from our apprehenſions of the too great force of cuſtom in literary matters, which are commonly governed upon a very different principle, if it could in the leaſt check the vanity of thoſe, who, being

wrapt

wrapt up in the fooliſh admiration of a few writers of their own age or country, ſeem to think, they cannot be too loud in their reproaches, nor too ſevere in their ridicule, againſt the ignorance and folly, the abſurdity and barbariſm, of former ages, I ſhall gain my purpoſe. But if it ſhould not have theſe effects, I hope, however, it may at leaſt prevent thoſe reproaches which might have been thrown out againſt the author of this performance, as if he intended to bind mankind in the trammels of antiquity, when all he propoſes is to let them looſe from thoſe of their contemporaries. It is by their contemporaries alone that mankind can be inſlaved, either in their perſons or in their opinions; and this latter ſpecies of ſlavery is ſo much the more to be dreaded, becauſe we are commonly inſenſible of it, or unwilling to be delivered from it.

CHAP. II.

IT has already been obſerved, that the opinions of the world, with regard to every ſubject, are very eaſily changed, or even

even perverted, by the favourite writers of the age. If this be the caſe with regard to matters of abſtract reaſoning, where the underſtanding alone is employed; if even the ſentiments of the heart, with regard to virtue and vice, be not altogether proof againſt the torrent of popular applauſe or diſapprobation; how much leſs can thoſe tender and delicate ſenſes, which diſcern the beauties or defects of works of imagination or genius, be ſuppoſed capable to reſiſt them! We find accordingly, that nothing is ſo liable to variation as taſte, which is a generic term employed to denote all theſe ſenſes. In particular, have not our opinions, within theſe few years, with regard to the merit of the Greek and Latin authors, undergone a very ſenſible revolution? Has it not been frequently inſinuated, that we are at vaſtly too much pains to acquire a knowledge of the ancient languages, which at beſt can only qualify us to underſtand writers who do not deſerve much attention, and who, ſome people would perſuade us, have too long wore thoſe laurels which ought in juſtice to be beſtowed on them, or their acquaintance? Such notions have been

attended

attended with bad conſequences to the intereſts of ancient learning, and produced ſeveral alterations in our univerſities; which were made, however, with reluctance, rather than triumph.

But of late an author * has appeared who treats the ancient languages much after the ſame manner the Roman tyrant treated his ſubjects: *Ita moriantur, ut ſentiant ſe mori.* He is not for deſtroying them ſimply, but with diſgrace and infamy; in which too he attempts to involve all thoſe who are acquainted with them. He is miſtaken, however, if he thinks, that by calling people bad names, he can render them either odious or contemptible. At this rate, notwithſtanding all the time which we may ſuppoſe he has employed in the ſtudy of the Engliſh language, there is not a porter to be met with in the ſtreets but might rival him in eloquence.

If the ancients, however, had no other antagoniſts but authors of this ſtamp, their victory would be eaſy; but, alas! their enemies are both numerous and

* The author of the Eſſays on Colleges, &c.

powerful;

powerful; and their natural ſtrength is greatly augmented by a variety of advantageous circumſtances.

Firſt of all, it cannot be denied, but that the improvement of arts, and extenſion of commerce, which, within theſe thirty years, hath ſo much altered the face of this country, and introduced among us a ſplendor and magnificence which a Scotchman who had not travelled, could formerly have formed no idea of; it cannot be denied, but that theſe have produced ſome effects on the manners of the people, which at leaſt are very problematical. We are now become, it is true, more refined in our behaviour, better acquainted with the arts of converſation and amuſements, and more ingenious in the invention of whatever may gratify our ſenſes, or pleaſe our fancy. But reverſe the medal: we have loſt our induſtry and application; whatever appears laborious, offends and frightens us; and we are diſpoſed to fall in with every propoſal which ſoothes our indolence and love of pleaſure. We are as indifferent about being really learned, as we are anxious to acquire the reputation of learning. We go about,

about, therefore, to inquire after compendious methods of arriving at general knowledge; and our writers, who know how to avail themſelves of the genius of the age, oblige us with their general hiſtories, univerſal dictionaries, &c.

In ſuch circumſtances, it is to be ſuppoſed, that we will ſwallow with pleaſure a draught which will at once deliver us from our apprehenſions of the fatigue attending the acquiſition of the ancient languages. Can any taſk be ſuppoſed more acceptable to the public, than to prove, that neither the pleaſure nor advantage ariſing from the authors who make uſe of theſe languages, can ever indemnify us for the time and labour we muſt beſtow in the acquiſition of them? Such notions have become ſo prevalent, that the Greek writers are very little known among us; and their language is leſs ſtudied every day. The knowledge of the Latin indeed is ſtill pretty general; and chiefly on account of ſome regulations, which, however, it is now become faſhionable to decry.

When we add to theſe conſiderations, that in Scotland we have no public ſchools where the ancient languages are taught much beyond the mere elements; that in

our univerſities a ſtudent is ſoon obliged to turn his attention to the ſciences; that no place, either in the law or the church, lays a man under the neceſſity of taking even a bachelor's degrees; there is the greateſt reaſon to believe, that in a ſhort time we ſhall be as ignorant of ancient learning, as of the writings of Aquinas or Jacob Behmen.

In this inquiſitive age, therefore, when men are ſo anxious in inveſtigating the conſequences of many things which perhaps may never happen, it cannot be conſidered as an uſeleſs undertaking, to inquire into what is likely to be the effects of the neglect of the ancient languages, which is daily gaining ground in this country; and to conſider, whether, in our preſent circumſtances, the ſtudy of theſe languages be of much conſequence. I am ſenſible how fooliſh it is for a writer that oppoſes vulgar prejudices to expect a fair and candid hearing; but if he has the good of ſociety at heart, he will not be diſcouraged by ſuch conſiderations. Becauſe what he ſays cannot have its full effect, it does not follow, that it ſhould have no effect at all.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

IN handling this ſubject, we ought to determine two queſtions: 1. Whether in our preſent circumſtances, conſidering the great variety of good writers among ourſelves, upon every branch of literature and philoſophy, it be of great importance to be acquainted with ancient authors? 2. Whether it be poſſible to reap much advantage from the ancient writers, without underſtanding the languages which they made uſe of?

In examining the firſt of theſe queſtions, I ſhall be aware of entering into the diſpute concerning ancient and modern learning. This diſpute has already been managed by able hands, whoſe performances are known to all the world. It is to be obſerved, that though we ſhould grant that the ancients were leſs acquainted than we are with the ſecondary cauſes which regulate the motions of the heavenly bodies; that they did not make ſo many experiments to diſcover, by means of heat

or mixture, the properties of the ſeveral claſſes of bodies, about which the ſcience of chymiſtry is employed; it does not follow from this conceſſion, that they were ignorant of the arts of war or government, of the motives which influence the human mind, the power of eloquence, the agreeable amuſements of poetry, painting, and muſic, or that ſcience, which is of all the moſt important to man, by which the perturbations of the human mind are allayed, or quieted, and thereby the calamities incident to human life alleviated, or removed. It is not neceſſary, therefore, in order to prove that we may be much benefited by reading the ancients, to enter into a detail of their knowledge upon the different ſciences: and as I propoſe to confine my obſervations to taſte and literature, and ſuch objects as may appear cloſely connected with them, it would be highly improper for me to enter into any ſuch detail.

For the ſake of perſpicuity, I ſhall divide the firſt branch of my ſubject into two parts. In the firſt place, I ſhall conſider what are thoſe circumſtances with regard to the ancient writers, which ought to recommend

recommend them to the ſtudy of the moderns in general; and, ſecondly, endeavour to prove, that the preſent ſtate of literature in this country renders the ſtudy of the ancient claſſics particularly uſeful to us.

In examining the firſt point, we ſhall begin with facts; and if we can diſcover, that the ſtudy of the Greek and Latin authors has, in every country of Europe, been attended with good taſte, and produced excellent writers in all the various kinds of compoſition; and that, on the contrary, with the decay of ancient learning, juſt taſte and fine writing have likewiſe decayed; we ſhall have reaſon to conclude, that there is ſome particular connection betwixt the one and the other. This concluſion will be rendered more certain, when we conſider in how favourable circumſtances the ancients were placed, for cultivating their talents to the utmoſt; circumſtances which no modern nation can boaſt of.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

SEveral centuries ago, the monks were the only claſs of men among whom learning of any kind was held in eſteem. In that body centered, not only all the knowledge of the times, but with them too were intruſted the works of thoſe authors who had written during the more refined ages of the world. School-divinity was the favourite ſtudy of thoſe eccleſiaſtics; and being deſirous to promote the knowledge of it, either from a notion of its real utility, or with a view to eſtabliſh their own dignity and importance, they not only taught *viva voce* thoſe who were diſpoſed to liſten to their inſtructions, but were aſſiduous in copying over the books which had been compoſed by ſchool-divines, in order to ſpread the knowledge of thoſe matters which they contained.

But as manufactures of every kind were then unknown, or neglected, the monks were frequently at a loſs for parchment to copy on, which, like the other materials

rials for the purpoſe of writing, appears to have been remarkably ſcarce in thoſe days. To ſupply this defect, they eraſed the characters from thoſe Latin or Greek books which were in their hands, and appeared to them uſeleſs or inſignificant. In the room of the ancient characters, they ſubſtituted their legendary tales, ſuperſtitious prayers, or ſcholaſtic diſcourſes. Several of theſe books are ſtill to be ſeen in the Popiſh countries of Europe; and, what is hardly to be credited, the admirable fragments of Greece and Rome have ſometimes been applied as coverings to the moſt ſuperſtitious, ridiculous, and abſurd performances that ever were produced by the brain of a monk.

Some centuries afterwards, thoſe very books which had been ſo diſreſpectfully treated by the monks, became the object of univerſal admiration; and ſince that time have been ſucceſſively viewed with rapture, indifference, coldneſs, or contempt, in the different nations of Europe. But we ſhall only touch upon the variations with reſpect to this matter in France and Italy.

After

After the inundations of the northern tribes had put an end to the Roman learning and empire, the Italians were the firſt people in Europe among whom polite literature began to be cultivated. The groſs ignorance and barbarity which then overſpread Europe, the cruel devaſtations of all ſorts of agreeable or uſeful books, which had fallen a prey to the rage of Goths, or ſuperſtitious prejudices of prieſts, prevented the earlieſt writers of this nation from acquiring a very extenſive acquaintance of the claſſic authors. Thoſe of the ancients, however, which happened to fall into their hands, they conſidered as the moſt ineſtimable treaſures which could have been beſtowed on them. They were preſerved with a religious care, and ſtudied with the utmoſt perſeverance. Dante, the father of Italian poetry, confeſſes himſelf indebted to Virgil, a copy of which he had accidentally met with, for all the applauſe and glory he acquired by his poetical performances.

But it was not till the ſixteenth century, that the Greek writers began to be ſtudied among the Italians; and before this time their

their knowledge, even of the Roman authors, was narrow and confined. During this century the knowledge of the Greek language was introduced into Italy by thoſe refugees, who, upon the taking of Conſtantinople, left their native country, and ſought protection in Italy, where a ray of that good taſte, which was ſoon to beam forth with ſo much luſtre, had already begun to diſplay itſelf. Along with the knowledge of the Greek writers, that of the Roman was by ſeveral accidents greatly extended, and the beſt geniuſes of Italy employed themſelves in tranſlating or imitating, in their own language, the authors of Greece and Rome.

This century was the Auguſtan age of modern Italy, and produced thoſe eminent writers, whoſe works are to this day admired all over Europe. Taſſo bore away the palm of epic poetry; Davila, Guicciardin, Machiavel, were equally diſtinguiſhed for hiſtorical compoſition; and, in one word, juſt ſentiment, good taſte, and proper expreſſion, though allayed with a ſmall mixture of oppoſite ingredients, were the prevailing characteriſtics of the writers of that age.

It would be in vain for any one to pretend, that the Italian authors who flouriſhed during this diſtinguiſhed period of their literary annals, did not form themſelves on the models of Greece and Rome; for theſe authors themſelves glory in confeſſing it; and the imitation is ſo ſtrongly marked, that a perſon of the ſmalleſt diſcernment muſt eaſily perceive it.

The principles of this age, however, were not thoſe by which the taſte of this nation continued long to be directed. The principle we mentioned in the beginning of this diſcourſe, by which mankind are ſo frequently led aſtray in literary matters, ſoon began to operate. The learned men in Italy at firſt looked with wonder on the works which were produced during the ſixteenth century. They expected that their nation would advance ſtill farther in the road to literary fame, and that ſucceeding ages would ſee the ancient authors as much excelled as they had already been ſucceſsfully imitated. They compared together the works of Taſſo and Virgil. They found a remarkable reſemblance betwixt them; but in their own poet, a few grains of that affected majeſty and falſe brilliancy,

brilliancy, which, how much ſoever they may dazzle on a ſuperficial ſurvey, cannot ſtand the teſt of an accurate examination. As theſe qualities, however, in Taſſo and his contemporaries, were accompanied with many beauties which in a great meaſure concealed their imperfections, as they were the only qualities in which theſe authors differed from the ancients, their countrymen conſidered them with that fond partiality which we naturally feel for what is new and uncommon, particularly if it belong to thoſe who are nearly connected with ourſelves. Taſſo therefore was preferred before Virgil, and for thoſe very blemiſhes which will for ever make him appear the inferior poet to all men of diſcernment. Homer, Cicero, and Livy, were no longer the objects of their imitation; they now give the preference to their own poets, orators, and hiſtorians, and on account of thoſe very qualities which were blameable in their productions. Upon this revolution, nothing but affectation and conceit, ſtrong flaſhes of wit, pointed ſimiles, and epigrammatic turns, were held worthy of attention. The Roman authors who moſt reſembled

their own, and delighted in puerile conceits, falſe ſallies, and artificial refinements, were now come into repute, and exalted into the place of the grave, manly, and nervous compoſitions of antiquity. Cicero, compared to Seneca, was flat and inſipid; Livy gave place to Florus and Quintus Curtius; Lucan and Martial were preferred to Virgil and Catullus. But the Italians have been brought back to a more juſt way of thinking, partly by the remonſtrances of ſome learned men among themſelves, and partly by the example of other nations, among whom the good taſte which had left Italy now began to flouriſh.

Whilſt the Italians were engaged in the cultivation of their language, and in forming their taſte upon ancient models, the French *literati* had continued immerſed in the ſubtilties and diſtinctions of the ſchools, and had made few efforts towards the improvement of polite literature. But as thoſe bodies which are the lateſt in arriving at maturity, generally become the moſt firm and vigorous, ſo the taſte of the French nation, though it required long time

time to form itſelf, at length attained to a very high degree of perfection.

In no nation of Europe were the claſſic authors more carefully ſtudied than in France, during the polite and learned reign of Francis I. To the learned men of that time, not only France, but all Europe, is indebted for clearing the road to the more extenſive knowledge of antiquity. The French themſelves, however, were not the firſt to reap the fruits of the labours and induſtry of their countrymen. Their language was ſtill inaccurate and defective; and it was impoſſible, with ſo coarſe materials, to form a compoſition which ſhould bear a reſemblance to thoſe of Greece and Rome.

The care of new-modelling and correcting their language devolved on the academy, whoſe ſucceſs in this particular is known to all the world. Warmed with an enthuſiaſm for the ancients, and employing a language both regular and elegant, the French, after this period, made noble advances in every branch of polite learning. In the ſeventeenth century, a conſtellation of the brighteſt geniuſes appeared together in this country that ever

ſhone

ſhone at once in any modern nation. Treading firmly in the footſteps of antiquity, and enjoying the advantage of cloſe intercourſe and converſation with one another, theſe great men have rendered their own names immortal, and will for ever reflect a luſtre on the literary fame of their native country.

But mark the effects of that fooliſh attachment and vain prejudice we all ſo naturally feel towards the writers of our own times or country. The members of that very academy which had been ſo ſucceſsful in the cultivation of the *belles lettres*, were the firſt to retard its progreſs, or rather to give it a wrong direction. It was proper they ſhould be ſenſible of their own merit; but their vanity made them ſuppoſe it to be much greater than it was in reality. They had ſeen, during that century, many improvements made in phyſic, mathematics, and in all the natural ſciences; they ſuppoſed, therefore, that all thoſe particulars in which their own poets, orators, or hiſtorians, differed from thoſe of Greece and Rome, were ſo many improvements on the ancients; and they gave the preference in literature, as well as in

ſcience,

ſcience, to the moderns, and particularly to the members of the academy.

Theſe pretenſions were oppoſed, not only by the writers of other nations, but alſo by the moſt eminent writers amongſt the French themſelves; and it was pleaſant to obſerve the vain whimſical writers of that country beſtowing praiſes on their contemporaries, which they themſelves diſavowed. A Fontenelle or a Perrault would have ſnatched the crown from Sophocles and Horace, to have placed it on the heads of Boileau and Racine; whilſt theſe latter refuſed to accept of a preſent which they knew poſterity would not ſuffer them to enjoy. They even went further; they declared, they had no right to it, and acknowledged the ancients for their lawful maſters. One ſhould have thought, that this behaviour in the generals muſt have greatly daunted the ſoldiers; but the ſpirit was univerſally diffuſed, and it was no longer poſſible to reſtrain or correct it.

We may pronounce, without fear of cenſure, that the taſte and literature of this nation has ever ſince been on the decline; becauſe we ſhall be ſupported in this aſſertion by the moſt learned and judicious

dicious authors among themſelves. And how indeed could it be otherwiſe, when they forſook the banners of thoſe leaders under which they had acquired ſo much glory, and attached themſelves to captains who were fit for nothing but parade and oſtentation? There have no doubt ariſen in France, ſince that time, ſome ſublime geniuſes; but even theſe, how valuable ſoever in other reſpects, have given too many proofs of their being infected with the bad taſte of the public. Who would wiſh to detract from the fame of the celebrated Monteſquieu, an author as venerable for the amiable and manly ſentiments of his heart, as for the extent and penetration of his underſtanding? but can it be concealed, that there is to be found, even in Monteſquieu, not only that affectation of brevity which ſo often renders him obſcure, but likewiſe that deſire of dazzling you with the ſplendor of his ſentiments, of ſurpriſing you with unexpected turns in the expreſſion, as well as in the thought, which are the ſure marks of an over-refined and vitiated taſte?

I have taken no notice of the Engliſh in this ſhort ſurvey; becauſe, to the honour

of

of the Engliſh, it muſt be owned, that they have been more ſteady than any nation of Europe in their admiration of the ancients; and any attempts towards introducing a newfangled taſte among them have been ſo weak and ſhort-lived, that they do not deſerve to be mentioned. Even at preſent, notwithſtanding the high advancement of all ſorts of literature in England, the Greeks and Romans are ſtill conſidered as the only models of juſt taſte, and elegant compoſition. Upon theſe models the taſte of their youth is carefully formed; and the idea of pedantry annexed to the ancient languages in France, and ſome other countries of Europe, has not as yet been adopted in England.

It is true indeed, that at preſent there is not to be met with in England ſo many diſtinguiſhed writers as in the reign of Queen Anne. Several cauſes conſpired to render the reign of that Queen the ſhining æra of Engliſh literature. It was then that a miniſtry governed England, moſt of whom were themſelves highly favoured by the muſes, and all great lovers and encouragers of literary merit. Beſides, it was in this reign that the Engliſh began

to be more particularly ſenſible of the advantages they might reap from the Greek and Roman writers in the cultivation of their own language. It was by the writers of Queen Anne's reign that the moſt beautiful flowers which adorned the gardens of Rome and Athens were tranſplanted into Engliſh ſoil. No very elegant writers, in proſe at leaſt, had appeared in Britain before this period. To write elegantly in proſe, therefore, was a new taſk; and the writers of that age performed it with an ardour and enthuſiaſm which commonly accompanies the firſt cultivators of any art or ſcience, and ſtamps a grace and dignity on their performances, which after ages may imitate or admire, but can never ſurpaſs or equal.

But though the ſtudy of the ancients has not been able to afford new heat to invigorate the literary purſuits of this country, it has been able at leaſt to prevent that corruption of taſte which in other countries is ſo juſtly complained of. We do not at preſent, indeed, find ſo many good performances in England as in the days of Queen Anne; but we meet with

with many fewer bad ones than appeared in France or Italy after the time of Taſſo and Corneille.

CHAP. V.

HAving, in the former chapter, given a deduction of facts, by which it appears, that the taſte of the modern nations of Europe has revived or decayed along with the ſtudy of the Greek and Roman writers, we ſhall now proceed to inquire into the peculiar circumſtances of theſe nations, which gave them ſo remarkable an advantage in point of literary merit, and hath rendered thoſe of their writings which remain the only ſure ſtandards of juſt taſte, and elegant compoſition.

To handle this ſubject in its full extent, would require an enumeration of many facts, which are now-a-days but little attended to; but I ſhall only mention a few obſervations which naturally ariſe from thoſe facts that are univerſally known;

and as the Roman learning was not the natural production of that country, but derived all its nouriſhment from Greece, I ſhall confine myſelf entirely to the latter.

There are two particulars which diſtinguiſh the independent ſtates of ancient Greece from the modern countries of Europe. The firſt, and moſt remarkable, is this, that thoſe ſtates enjoyed a free government at a much earlier period of their hiſtory than any of the modern nations: the ſecond, that the bounds of the ancient ſtates were much leſs extenſive, being, in general, no larger than thoſe of the ſeveral counties into which this country is divided.

Now, as to the firſt of theſe facts, it has been ſo often proved, that liberty is of the utmoſt conſequence to the progreſs of all branches of learning, that an author who ſhould once more undertake this taſk might juſtly be accuſed of impertinence or folly.

There is one obſervation, however, with regard to this ſubject, of ſingular importance. In Great Britain, where a free government has for ſome time been eſta-

bliſhed, and in the other modern countries of Europe, where a regular police, and ſtrict obſervance of the laws relative to private juſtice, in ſome meaſure ſupply the place of it, we may obſerve, that theſe eſtabliſhments were chiefly owing to the advancement of commerce, which delivered the lower ranks of people from their ſervile dependence on the nobility, and threw a great ſhare of wealth into the ſcale of the commons. But commerce, which introduces luxury, diſſipation, a high reliſh for amuſement and ſenſual pleaſure, is exceedingly pernicious to all improvements of the more elegant kind, and operates on the arts and ſciences in a direction quite oppoſite to that of the independence and ſecurity which are introduced by it. Thus, in modern times, it has happened, that the effects of circumſtances favourable to the advancement of the ſciences, or finer arts, have been counteracted by commerce. The liberty of the ancient ſtates, on the contrary, aroſe from the narrowneſs * of their boundaries. Their

* The circumſtances among the Greeks which produced their ſuperior improvements in arts and ſciences

Their commerce was never very conſiderable, and had made but little progreſs when their literary fame was in its meridian ſplendor.

As to the ſecond fact, viz. the ſmallneſs of the ſeveral ſtates which compoſed an-

ſciences may all be traced up to one natural cauſe, viz. the ſmall portions into which this country, by mountains, rivers, incroachments of the ſea, &c. is divided. Theſe kept the different tribes of the Pelaſgi, and other ancient nations, by which Greece was peopled, ſepurate from each other, and made them form ſo many ſmall independent ſtates. Though originally theſe ſtates were ſubject to chieftains reſembling the Counts or Barons of the Feudal times, it was not to be ſuppoſed, that this form of government could long remain. In a ſmall ſtate the ſplendor of the ſovereign is not ſo bright as to dazzle and confound his ſubjects. They have more frequent opportunities of ſeeing and converſing with him. Beſides, as the members of the ſtate are but few, each will conceive himſelf to be particularly intereſted in the management of public affairs; juſt as in a coffeehouſe or aſſembly, the fewer the company, the more important is each individual. Again, when any diſcontent ariſes, the flame is more eaſily communicated from one to another: they can meet with more ſecrecy to concert meaſures for their common ſafety; and before the ſovereign is appriſed of their deſigns, the whole body may be unanimous in reſolving his deſtruction. Thus ſmall ſtates have a natural tendency to an early freedom; and from this circumſtance the improvement of arts and ſciences ſeems principally to ariſe.

cient

cient Greece, it may be obſerved, that in a country which is divided into a number of independent ſovereignties, the occaſions which exerciſe the virtue or abilities of great men muſt be more frequent, than in one which is united in one body-politic. It is here, therefore, that we are to expect to find thoſe magnanimous actions which inſpire the muſes, and animate all the arts of imitation. With what fervour and enthuſiaſm would a Buchanan have related the battles of Marathon, Salamis, or Platea! Where can we find ſo many ſubjects for the epic or tragic muſe as in the hiſtory of ancient Greece?

We may further obſerve, that in a country which is divided into ſeveral ſtates, the influence of faſhion upon literature is leſs conſiderable. In France or England, the bad taſte of a few writers, who, from the ſingularity of their opinions, or ſome other circumſtance, have attracted the public attention, is eaſily communicated from one extremity of the country to the other, becomes faſhionable, and is univerſally adopted. In Greece, on the contrary, though a capricious humour might ſeize a particular ſtate, the other ſtates being detached

detached from it, would eſcape the infection. Their emulation for glory rendered them ſhy in adopting whatever ſprung up among their neighbours: they conſidered their performances with the jealouſy of a rival, rather than with the partiality of a friend or countryman.

But, not to enlarge on the advantages of the diviſion of territory, conſidered in itſelf, we ſhall conclude, with taking notice, that its effects upon the political ſituation of the ancients, which again introduced thoſe manners ſo favourable to the arts, deſerve principally to be attended to. The extent of territory, or number of men, were objects of the greateſt importance with the Greeks in all their political inquiries; and Ariſtotle * aſſerts, that

* Ariſtotle, *Ethics*, *lib.* 9. *cap.* 10.

The ingenious Mr Hume, in his eſſay on the populouſneſs of ancient nations, draws a ſingular concluſion from this paſſage, and makes the Greek philoſopher utter an abſurdity as glaring as any he himſelf was ever accuſed of. His obſervations, however, are founded on a miſtake of the meaning of the word πολις, which is never uſed by Ariſtotle to denote a city, in our ſenſe of the word when we ſay, that London or Paris is a city. Πολις, with him, ſignified a number of men connected together by a political tye, each of whom had a voice in the legiſlature, and a right to

that it is impoſſible for a city to contain 100,000 men.

It is impoſſible to enumerate all the circumſtances among the Greeks which concurred to accelerate the progreſs of the human mind. Even thoſe of their cuſtoms which have been moſt ſeverely ſtigmatized by modern writers, were favourable to the advancement of arts and ſciences. That, for inſtance, of domeſtic ſlavery, the moſt exceptionable of all their inſtitutions, was not more favourable to the preſervation of their democratical policy, than to the cultivation of the elegant arts: for as all menial or mechanic ſervices were performed by ſlaves, freemen had nothing to attend to but the refined purſuit of letters or liberty.

There is one peculiarity more, with which I ſhall conclude this chapter. The Greeks are the firſt people we are acquainted with who cultivated what is properly called *taſte:* for though the eaſtern nations made conſiderable progreſs in the

to honours and preferments; *Ariſtotle, Politics, lib.* 3. *cap.* 1. In this ſenſe it will be found, I believe, that Ariſtotle had reaſon to ſay, that a city could not conſiſt of 100,000 members.

ſciences, we have not the faintest traces of any thing like taſte in any of their productions. Their buildings indeed, according to the accounts of the Greek writers, were great and aſtoniſhing; but the temples of Diana and Jupiter Olympus will ever be conſidered as the firſt monuments of regular architecture. As for painting, it is probable, that, according to the proper ſenſe of the word, it was a Grecian invention; and nothing we know of the literature of the Eaſtern * nations gives us the leaſt ground to believe, that the Greek poets, orators, or hiſtorians, could receive any advantage from the ſtudy of it. The Greeks †, therefore,

* We make no mention of the ſacred writings, which ought not to be put on a footing with human productions. Judea was not one of thoſe countries into which the Greeks travelled with a view to acquire knowledge; nor is there the leaſt ſhadow of proof, that the ſacred writings were known to the Greeks.

† It is ſomewhat remarkable, that this reaſoning, which ought ſo ſtrongly to recommend the Greek writers, has been uſed as an argument againſt them. It has often been aſſerted, that the modern nations of Europe would have made more noble advances in the polite arts, had they never been brought acquainted with the productions of antiquity. Had that been the caſe, it is pretended, we ſhould have copied nature alone; our talents would have exerted themſelves with a bolder ſpring, and our natural

fore, were the firſt people in the world who breathed into the arts that ſpirit and life which captivates the heart, and ſoothes the paſſions. It was to them that nature firſt pointed out the "gayeſt, happieſt, attitudes of things." Their flights were not reſtrained by the curb of rules, nor the ſervile imitation of former writers: and as nature alone was their guide, it is not ſurpriſing we ſhould diſcover in their productions a fervour and animation which ſucceeding ages may admire, but can never equal. The Romans, who came next

natural genius had its full ſcope and career. People who reaſon in this way do not conſider, that the modern nations were never placed in ſuch favourable circumſtances for cultivating the finer arts as the ancients. The extenſive kingdoms into which Europe was divided; the tyranny of the chieftains, or great leaders, which was ſucceeded by that of kings or prieſts, and in ſome countries by luxury and avarice; theſe circumſtances diſqualified us for the purſuits of learning, which probably would never have gained ground among us, had we not been made acquainted with the Greek and Latin authors. But even on the ſuppoſition, that our earlieſt writers would have been more perfect had they paid no attention to the Greeks or Romans, the caſe at preſent is very much altered: we have now a great many performances in the modern languages; and were we to throw the ancients aſide, theſe performances, and not nature, would be the objects of our imitation.

to them, followed implicitly the Grecian maſters; and all ſucceeding writers who have acquired glory by works of genius or fancy, have kept conſtantly in their eye either the one or the other.

CHAP. VI.

FRom what is ſaid in the laſt chapter, I hope we ſhall know what to think of thoſe obſervations which are now-a-days ſo common, That the ancients did very well, conſidering the circumſtances of the times in which they lived; that theſe circumſtances are a ſufficient excuſe for the author, though they can never juſtify the performance, &c.

We are now to ſhew, that the preſent ſtate of literature in our own country renders the ſtudy of the claſſics particularly uſeful to us.

To trace the progreſs of learning in Scotland, is what no native, as far as I know, has as yet attempted. A learned foreigner*, however, has done for us what

* Denina ſur la vicende della literatura.

we

we have neglected to do for ourſelves; and his obſervations on this ſubject are the more valuable, as there is no reaſon to believe he would be biaſſed by the prejudices to which a Scotchman, in matters of this kind, lies ſo much expoſed.

This foreigner juſtly attributes the quick progreſs of letters of late years among the Scotch to the induſtry and abilities of the celebrated Dr Hutchiſon. By his publications, lectures, and private diſcourſes, this great man diffuſed a ſpirit for literature over the whole country, but inſpired an enthuſiaſm for it into the members and ſtudents of the univerſity of Glaſgow, with which he was more particularly connected. It was by him that the taſte for the ancient languages in particular was introduced into this univerſity; a taſte which was to ſpread ſo univerſally, and to be productive of ſo many good conſequences.

To what this foreigner has ſaid upon the ſubject, we may add, that it was natural to expect, that the æra of Scotch literature would ſoon follow the age of Pope, Swift, and Addiſon. It was not to be imagined, that letters would advance in both kingdoms with an equal pace. It is always

always ſome time before the taſte which prevails in the capital, or more poliſhed parts of a kingdom, be diffuſed throughout the remoter corners of it. In the courſe of a few years, however, if there be no impediment in the way, the ſame taſte pervades the whole country, and is ſometimes found active and vigorous in the extremities, while in the centre it droops, languiſhes, and decays.

But whatever perſons or circumſtances introduced into Scotland the taſte which is to be diſcerned in many of our writers, and which will for ever render them an honour to their country, it cannot be denied, that every one who attends to the preſent ſtate of letters among us, muſt be ſenſible of many ſtrong ſymptoms of its decline.

To cenſure the works of any claſs of writers, is a diſagreeable taſk; but to cenſure the works of living authors, is not only diſagreeable, but dangerous, and even invidious. I cannot help, however, making one obſervation, which moſt people who are fond of reading can be at no loſs to apply: it is this, That of the many publications under which the preſs has of late

late groaned, the greater part are ſeldom honoured with a ſecond reading. They ſold indeed, becauſe the world is fond of amuſement: they were the talk of the tea-table, the coffeehouſe, and even of literary ſocieties, for ſome weeks together, becauſe novelty charms us: but then, alas! many of them are already gone, where the reſt muſt ſoon follow, *in vicum vendentem thus et odores.* But why are the productions of modern wit ſo ſhort-lived? What is the conſtitutional defect under which they labour? A great one indeed: they want both brain and nerves; and under ſuch circumſtances, ought not their longevity rather to ſurpriſe us? Few animals, whatever ſtories credulous naturaliſts may tell, live as long after decollation. But to quit this metaphor, they want both deep obſervation and juſt expreſſion, which I take to be as neceſſary to the exiſtence of a book, as brain and nerves are to that of an animal. As to the ſtyle, in particular, is there not to be diſcovered in it that falſe poliſh which glitters but for a moment, that over-refinement which diſguſts every reader of taſte, and makes him cry out, *This is not the language of Nature!*

But

But from what corrupt ſource doth this ſuperficiality of thought, this quaintneſs of expreſſion, proceed? Why are the bulk of our Scotch writers at preſent ſo much inferior to thoſe of England in the days of Queen Anne, while a few individuals diſcover as much penetration of thought, and ſkill in compoſition, as even Addiſon himſelf could boaſt of? As to particular perſons, it is to be obſerved, that an author would only expoſe himſelf to ridicule, who, without the moſt intimate acquaintance with them, ſhould pretend to aſſign the cauſes by which their taſte has been directed. But it is a matter of no great difficulty to diſcover thoſe which operate on the many, and direct the general taſte of a nation. Theſe latter cauſes, as they have been able to produce ſo extenſive effects, muſt be more powerful and ſteady, and conſequently more palpable and obvious.

It appears to me, therefore, that Scotland has undergone the ſame revolutions with France and Italy *, and for ſimilar reaſons. The taſte for ancient learning

* Chap. 4.

introduced

introduced among us gave birth to ſeveral elegant productions. With theſe, and the Engliſh authors, the moſt of us are ſatiſfied. Our partiality in favour of theſe books gives them a higher value than they deſerve, and makes us neglect thoſe perfect models of antiquity, of which they are but faint and imperfect copies. We admire, we imitate the writers of our own iſland; even their faults are the object of our approbation, and their beauties degenerate into faults in their ſervile imitators. The eaſy and copious flow of Addiſon becomes languor and tautology: the pregnant brevity of Swift degenerates into an affected and unintelligible obſcurity: the manly nervous eloquence of Bolingbroke into bombaſt, mock-majeſty, and pompous declamation.

But the effects of this bad taſte in our writers are not yet ſo extenſive as they are likely to become. Though it may be laid down as a certain maxim, That the bulk of mankind will always be directed by the writers of their own age; yet it requires time to diffuſe the opinions or taſte of theſe writers through the whole body of the people. The number of thoſe who read

in a commercial country is not conſiderable, when compared to that of thoſe who form their opinions of books, as well as of the ſubjects on which they treat, from what they hear in converſation, or learn from their experience in the world. Yet the opinions of the more numerous claſs are formed upon thoſe of the few; which again, in a great meaſure, depend on thoſe of the writers who flouriſh in the preſent times. We may obſerve, with regard to this ſubject, therefore, that things proceed in a circle. The taſte of the writers in any country, which is formed upon that of the age in which they live, reacts upon the taſte of that age, and ſtrengthens the prevailing principles by which it is governed. We have but too ſtrong reaſons, therefore, to convince us, that, if left to ourſelves, we ſhall depart ſtill farther from the path of reaſon and nature. For as the palate, when accuſtomed to high-ſeaſoned and luxurious diſhes, loſes all reliſh for ſimple and ſalutary nouriſhment; ſo the mental taſte, when once perverted by artificial and over-refined compoſitions, loſes the diſcernment of true beauties and perfections.

Was

Was it therefore ever more neceſſary than at preſent to cultivate an acquaintance with the writers of antiquity; who, having ſtood the teſt of many ages, and weathered all the ſtorms which ignorance and conceit, and the love of novelty, have raiſed, can alone aſpire to the honour of being conſidered as ſtandards of what is true, natural, and perfect? If we are not deſirous that the age in which we live may become the ridicule and contempt of ſucceeding ages, if we do not wiſh that our clergymen ſhould preach, our orators and ſtateſmen argue and declaim in the ſame taſte in which ſome of our authors have already compoſed, we ought to beſtow more attention on the ancient claſſics, and leſs on that fungous growth of modern eſſays, inquiries, diſſertations, &c. by which we are leſs amuſed, and as little inſtructed, as by our novels and romances.

Now, we might trace the effects of this corruption of taſte, for which we propoſe the ſtudy of the ancients as a remedy, upon the manners and happineſs of this country. The hiſtory of thoſe nations who have flouriſhed in the world before us, affords abundance of materials for

this purpoſe. We ſhall always find, that a corruption of taſte has been ſpeedily attended by a decay of liberty, and depravity of manners. But leſt this ſubject ſhould oblige us to launch farther into hiſtory than we would incline, it may not be improper to conclude this chapter with mentioning what advantages we may derive from reading the Greek and Roman writers with reſpect to theſe particulars.

Firſt of all, it will, on reflection, appear evident, that ancient learning is the beſt defence againſt the inevitable effects of commerce and riches. In a commercial, or, as the phraſe now is, in a poliſhed country, though the ſociety in general have more knowledge than is commonly to be met with in one leſs advanced in the arts of luxury and refinement; yet this is by no means the caſe with the individuals who compoſe it. It may in general be obſerved, that the more improved any country is, the more ignorant are the bulk of the inhabitants who live in it. This may at firſt ſight appear a paradox; but on examination will become abundantly evident. As the eye which has been long accuſtomed to the uſe of the quadrant, or

the

the chain, is unable, when unaſſiſted, to judge concerning heights or diſtances; ſo, in a commercial country, where a man can accompliſh every thing by the help of others, he uſually puts ſo much confidence in this help, that in a ſhort time he becomes incapable of doing any thing without it. It was with good reaſon, therefore, that Plato, who ſaw this inconvenience, and has ſo beautifully explained the principle on which it is founded, endeavours, by ſentiment as well as by intereſt, to connect together the members of his imaginary republic.

Commerce cannot ſubſiſt without improvement in arts and manufactures, which ſuppoſes dexterity, ſkill, and expedition, in thoſe who are exployed in them; and theſe can never be attained, unleſs each individual be tied down to one branch of art. This branch he becomes perfectly acquainted with; but every thing beyond it is to him a myſtery. It is thus that commerce, while it enlarges our poſſeſſions, debaſes our minds, cramps our genius, and confines our underſtandings.

Theſe effects are not confined to the lower ranks of men: they extend to every member

member of the ſociety. Now, can any thing be conceived more proper for oppoſing them, than bringing us acquainted with the ancient ſtate of the world, preſenting us with a picture of nations, among whom our manners were as much unknown as the avarice which inſpires them; nations that made Tigranes cry out, "Heavens! with what enemies have "we to do! inſenſible to intereſt, they "fight only for glory!"

But this leads me to conſider another diſeaſe introduced by commerce, which too may, in a great meaſure, be remedied by a familiarity with ancient ſentiments. If we were to examine the hiſtory of all nations upon the face of the earth, we ſhould find, that a high advancement in commerce has ever been attended with the loſs of martial ſpirit. It has always been found neceſſary, therefore, in ſuch nations to eſtabliſh mercenary ſtanding armies, in order to defend the inhabitants againſt the attempts of their more warlike neighbours. Upon theſe armies the ſafety of commercial countries entirely depends. The Dutch, when their mercenaries were conquered, propoſed to imbark for the

Eaſt Indies; and a handful of highlandmen, in 1715, over-run the moſt wealthy and commercial country of Europe.

But what is the reaſon that the inhabitants of ſuch countries are ſo little able, on any ſudden emergence, to take upon them the military character, and to make a ſtand for their own defence? The lower people are not worſe fed or cloathed, they are not more feeble or ſickly, than they were in former ages. But both the lower ranks, and thoſe who ſhould command them, want that heart and ſpirit which is the life and ſoul of all military operations. How ſhall we inſpire them with courage? You anſwer, By making ſoldiers of them, and leading them into the field. What, all of them ſoldiers? No; but the greater part. Then we loſe our commerce, and give up one advantage for another. But if there be any method which may give us both advantages, I think it is by keeping freſh in their minds the great examples of proweſs and bravery which the hiſtory of ancient nations affords us. Theſe are to be preferred to any which modern times can boaſt of, becauſe they are frequently recounted by thoſe who perform-

ed

ed them, and with that circumſtantial minuteneſs which alone can affect the paſſions and the heart.

It is almoſt unneceſſary to obſerve, that an acquaintance with antiquity would prove a ſpecific antidote againſt the groſs luxury, and giddy diſſipation, which is every day gaining ground in this country. The patriotiſm of their ſtateſmen does not more diſgrace our venality and corruption, than the purity of their philoſophical maxims, the honeſt ſimplicity, and amiable candour of their whole lives and demeanour, diſgraces * * *

There is ſtill another obſervation which deſerves attention. It is generally believed, that the Britiſh government has a tendency towards abſolute monarchy. This opinion is juſtified by many ſtrong arguments; and from the licentiouſneſs of ſome paſt years, as mankind run from one extreme to another, it is rendered more probable than ever. If, then, this opinion be true, ought we not to employ every method which may prolong the precious term of our freedom? Can we be too eager to preſerve the glorious poſſeſſion? a poſſeſſion which juſtly renders us

the

the envy of our neighbours; becauſe it ſecures to us alone the native privileges of humanity, and exalts us therefore into a ſcale of being to which few nations have ever attained. In vain will you attempt to preſerve it by laws, which may be tranſgreſſed, or by armies, which may be conquered or corrupted. It is a poſſeſſion which muſt exiſt in the hearts of the people; there it is to be infuſed by early culture, and great examples. But to what culture muſt we have recourſe? what examples ſhall we apply? Muſt we lead a young man into France, there to learn the maxims of refined deſpotiſm? muſt we ſhew him the ancient map of his own country, when Britain, like all the reſt of Europe, groaned under the burden of a thouſand petty tyrants? muſt we inſtruct him in the works of our modern philoſophers, who would teach mankind to be happy without liberty? No; but we muſt point out to him a Brutus: he will ſoon diſcern him, with his reeking poniard, hailing his noble compatriots. Let him hear a Cicero, or a Demoſthenes, uſing a language different from his own, unacquainted with his manners and cuſtoms,

yet agreeing with him in this great particular of defending the natural rights of mankind, how will his heart beat, his blood warm, and every latent ſpark of public ſpirit be inflamed in his boſom!

CHAP. VII.

WE are in this chapter to attempt proving, that it is impoſſible for us to receive much advantage from ancient authors, without underſtanding the languages in which they compoſed.

The author of the eſſays on colleges has a paſſage on this ſubject, which, for the ſingularity of it, I ſhall tranſcribe: "A "Latin or Greek book," ſays he, "has, "in the eye of a modern, a certain witch-"craft or charm ſpread over it, which "mightily enhances its value. Tranſlate "that book, the charm is generally gone," &c. The author's reaſon for this too has a charm, or rather a witchcraft, in it: "Let us ſuppoſe," ſays he, "I am read-"ing a tranſlation of ſome Latin book; "and that, if it can be ſuppoſed, this "book

" book is able neither to afford inſtruction
" nor entertainment. Let the tranſlation
" have at leaſt all the ſenſe, eloquence,
" fire of the original," (which muſt be a great deal ſurely, as the book is able to afford neither inſtruction nor entertainment); " let their merit," ſays he, " be
" every way equal. There is no occaſion,
" in reading this tranſlation, for the leaſt
" attention, in order to underſtand the
" meaning of the words; they are all eaſy
" and familiar. I read on," (the greater fool you); " but not finding any inſtruc-
" tion, any entertainment, any thing that
" can give the ſmalleſt exerciſe to my
" mind, I become dull, drowſy, and at
" laſt fall aſleep. I awake, and condemn
" the book. Then I take up the ſame book,
" and read it in the original language. In
" this caſe, beſide the prejudice of edu-
" cation, which makes me look upon e-
" very book that is in Latin as venerable,
" I am obliged to attend, in order to un-
" derſtand the meaning of the words. A-
" ny thing that can command attention,
" any thing that can give exerciſe to the
" mind, is naturally ſo far pleaſing and
" agreeable. The Latin book afforded

" this pleaſure; and therefore I am neceſ-
" ſarily diſpoſed to beſtow a proportiona-
" able degree of praiſe upon it." Strange! by what charm can you make me believe, that I ſhall be pleaſed with a book in proportion to the trouble I am obliged to take in order to underſtand it? I always thought, that a book which was written in an eaſy and familiar way, would be more agreeable than one which was couched in abſtruſe and unintelligible language. If the tranſlation, therefore, diſpleaſed me, I muſt be doubly diſpleaſed with the original, upon finding nothing in it, after all my labour, either inſtructive or entertaining.

I agree, however, with the author, in believing, that the Latin and Greek books have a charm in the original, which immediately diſſolves on tranſlating them; though I cannot be perſuaded, that this charm ariſes from the difficulty of underſtanding them. At this rate, Jacob Behmen would be the moſt charming of all authors. Beſides, I cannot agree, that all tranſlators have been equally ſucceſsful in diſſolving this charm. Mr Pope, for inſtance, has been one of the worſt conju-

rers

rers in the world; and, I ſuppoſe, the nearer connection one has with Apollo and the muſes, the leſs aſſiſtance muſt he expect from the infernal divinities, who are the dealers in incantations.

But be that as it may, it is certain, that there are few tranſlations which a man can read with advantage. To be a good tranſlator, I will aſſert, is a more difficult matter than to be a good author. Genius is ſufficient for the one; but both genius and erudition in an eminent degree muſt unite in forming the character of the other. If it were poſſible that a tranſlator ſhould appear, who was ſufficiently warmed with the fire of his author, who entered fully into his meaning and ſpirit, was acquainted with the manners of thoſe to whom he wrote, the whole tenor of the author's works, as well as thoſe of others who have handled the ſame ſubject, and not merely with the work he undertakes to tranſlate, which can never be ſufficient;—but I am ſuppoſing an impoſſibility;—a man of ſuch talents would deſpiſe to tranſlate; or were he by miracle inclined to it, the character accompanying ſuch talents would forever unqualify him.

But

But how different a ſort of people are the bulk of our tranſlators? Without genius or abilities, without erudition or induſtry, they are perſons who, having no fund of their own, are deſirous of getting bread by trafficking on that of others. What a poor figure do the works of the ancient philoſophers make in the tranſlation of thoſe who hardly underſtand the words of the original, and are altogether ignorant of the general ſyſtem of the author! To tranſlate any of thoſe works with propriety, what an immenſe ſtock of learning does it require! An exact and critical knowledge of the language in which the author writes; a particular acquaintance with this author, of the new words he is obliged to employ, of the old ones to which he affixes a different meaning; a thorough knowledge of the philoſophy of his ſect in all its different parts. And yet let us ſuppoſe a tranſlator ſufficiently qualified in all theſe reſpects, where ſhall he find materials? how tranſlate the ancient authors into a modern language? With what words can he expreſs the ſublime conceptions of a Sophocles or a Homer? Can we imitate in Engliſh that elegance

gance of arrangement, that nice counterpoiſe of diction, which required all the flections of the Greek tongue, directed by the ſkill and taſte of an Iſocrates? Where ſhall we find materials for that manly unaffected force of eloquence which Demoſthenes, like him who wields the thunder, uſed as an invincible weapon againſt every opponent? Have recourſe to your tranſlations, read them over and again; will you ever diſcover in them that ſublime majeſty, or that amiable ſimplicity, by which the works of Plato and Xenophon, for two thouſand years, have charmed and tranſported every reader of taſte?

But, ſays a man of the modern philoſophic ſpirit, why attend to authors of this ſtamp, whoſe beauties are too tranſcendent to admit of imitation, and from whom, therefore, we can expect no aſſiſtance in the cultivation of our own language, an object to us of the utmoſt importance? A mind truly liberal, how much ſoever refined by philoſophy, would hardly aſk ſuch a queſtion. But if he ſhould, the following anſwer would undoubtedly ſatisfy him. To induce you to view the glorious works of nature, muſt you be bribed by a hire? Without the

proſpect

proſpect of ſome advantage, would you never rouſe yourſelf in a morning to behold the riſing of the ſun, or turn your eyes to that golden radiance, which, as he goes down, is every where diffuſed around him? During the ſerenity of a fine evening, did the boundleſs expanſe of the ocean, reflecting the ſilvery rays of the moon, or the azure concavity of the heavens variouſly illumined by the gleaming fires of the north, never affect you with emotions of inexpreſſible delight, and teach you, that the generous ſoul of man was formed for beholding the beautiful and ſublime? If this be the caſe with reſpect to the works of nature, why ſhould it be otherwiſe with reſpect to thoſe of art? If our inſenſibility to them ariſes from their being the productions of men, it is inhuman; if becauſe we ourſelves are unable to equal them, it is envious. But it would not be true, that we could receive no advantage from the writers of antiquity, though we ſhould never be able to approach to their perfection. Our ſtatuaries never pretended to equal thoſe of Greece; but by admiring a few Grecian ſtatues, they arrived at a degree of perfection, to which they

they could never otherwiſe have attained; and it will for ever be a truth, that the more perfect the pattern, the more perfect likewiſe will be the imitation.

But, allowing every advantage on the ſide of the language, as well as on that of the tranſlator, it would not follow, that the productions of the Greeks and Romans would affect us with the ſame ſenſations, when read in the modern and in the original languages. This ſubject is more delicate than any we have yet attempted to handle; and to explain it fully, would require more words than perhaps, in a performance of this kind, it would be proper to beſtow on a matter of mere curioſity. We appeal therefore to the feeling of every man who is acquainted with the writings of antiquity, whether he be not ſenſible of a pleaſure in reading them in the ancient languages, beyond what a tranſlation affords him; which cannot be accounted for from the ſuperiority of the original, either in point of eloquence or ſentiment. The train of ideas which ariſes in the mind of every reader of taſte, is altogether different, upon peruſing the Iliad in the original, and

in Pope's tranſlation. Ancient ſentiments, however adorned, muſt ſtrike and affect; but they appear with a peculiar grace in the dreſs of antiquity; and it is in the languages alone of thoſe who felt them, that they can produce their full effects on the human heart.

I intended here to conſider, in a more particular manner, the force of thoſe objections againſt ſtudying the ancient languages, as if they retarded the improvement of our own tongue, and to make ſome obſervations on the advantages we might receive from the ſtudy of thoſe languages in this very particular: but as this performance has already greatly exceeded the bounds I had preſcribed to myſelf, I ſhall take another opportunity of handling theſe matters, and likewiſe of examining a queſtion which has of late been agitated about the manner of teaching the Civil law, viz. Whether the law of the Romans may be taught with moſt general advantage in the Latin or Engliſh tongue?

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THE END.